

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Friday, July 29, 2005

Contact: Drew Nannis (202) 225-5065

**STARK PUTS SENIORS ON ALERT: REPUBLICANS LOOK TO SCORE POLITICAL POINTS BY 'SELLING' MEDICARE DRUG PLANS**

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA, 13th) warned all Americans today to be on their toes as the Republican Party and health care industry lobbyists have announced a PR campaign to induce seniors to sign up for the new Medicare drug bill.

As reported in *CQ Today*, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay asked health care industry lobbyists yesterday to help push the new drug plans not because it would benefit seniors, but because it would set the stage for Republican success in the 2006 midterm elections and help push Social Security privatization. Tom DeLay ran a meeting yesterday with 50 of the biggest health care lobbyists where he was quoted saying, "If we have credibility with seniors, they'll start trusting us on Social Security."

In reference to the campaign, House GOP Deputy Whip, Eric Cantor (R-VA) said: "The Republicans need to be thinking like Madison Avenue. This is about marketing. This is about follow-through. This is about market share for our product."

"New Medicare drug plans are expected to cause mass-confusion among those seeking to sign up, and the Republican Party is now committed to muddying the waters further for political gain," Stark said. "It's well known that I voted against the Medicare Modernization Act and I am no fan of this complicated law. However, I am working to ensure seniors have accurate, non-partisan educational materials so they can make informed decisions. Members who use it as a political cookie to earn votes from unsuspecting senior citizens and people with disabilities may find in the end that it is too tough to swallow."

Perhaps most unsettling were comments made by Congresswoman Ginny Brown-Waite, a Republican from Florida, "Do not be afraid to go into the minority community. I know sometimes Republicans feel uncomfortable in minority communities, but this is our opportunity to let them know what we've done."

Stark's response: "Our Republican colleagues might want to proceed with caution before following Ms. Brown-Waite's advice. If Republicans actually explain "what they've done" to Medicare patients, they may get as warm a reception as our soldiers did when they were told

they'd be welcomed in Iraq with open arms and flowers."

Stark urged anyone who is interested in getting more information about the Medicare drug program to contact organizations who do not stand to benefit financially or politically and whose purpose is to educate, not politicize. For instance, residents of California are advised to call the California Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP) at 1-800-434-0222.